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VOL. XII.

NO. 3.

LEHIGH VALLEY MEDICAL MAGAZINE.

THE JOURNAL OF

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PUBLISHED MONTHLY.

MARCH, 1901.

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LEHIGH VALLEY MEDICAL MAGAZINE.

Vol. XII.

MARCH, 1901.

No. 3.

ORIGINAL ARTICLES.

THE BURDEN OF HEREDITARY MENTAL DISEASES.¹

BY W. H. HARTZELL, M.D., Allentown, Pa.

It may appear like a waste of time to present proofs of the existence of heredity as a large factor in the production of those forms of nervous diseases of which I propose to speak. My reasons for doing so are twofold ; the existence of heredity as such a factor, has been occasionally denied by men in such position in the medical world that their opinions must carry some weight, even though they are opposed by the large majority of thinking men who have given this subject their attention and the existence of statistics which have been most carefully compiled and verified ; moreover, the large and rapidly increasing number of these defectives, and the rapidly growing burden of their maintenance, as well as their harmful effect on society at large, can only be realized in this way.

The three forms of nervous diseases which are most certain to make their victims more or less dependent, and thereby become the burden of which I complain are epilepsy, insanity, and imbecility. Either of these disorders interferes seriously with the victim's power of self-support, renders him dangerous to society, and becomes the burden on the public, the support of which involves all taxpayers and at a rate alarmingly.

In dealing with heredity in this connection it is not reasonable to expect each of these conditions to reproduce itself exactly in kind. The law of heredity is, that each characteristic in the parents *tends* to reproduce itself in the offspring. Again, characteristics derived from one parent may be masked or overcome by the influence of the other, they may be permanently obliterated.

¹ Read before the Lehigh Valley Medical Association, Easton, Pa., January 31, 1901.

ted, or reappear a generation farther on, under favoring circumstances. The three conditions I have enumerated are all merely evidences of functional disturbances of the higher nervous centers, due to trophic or organic change. The special form and order of appearance are dependent largely or entirely on the portion of the brain implicated and the age of the subject ; as for instance, where brain trouble occurs early in life we may expect epilepsy or imbecility, or both ; and when this trouble happens after the mental growth is more or less developed, we look for insanity, because the inhibitory control of the motor centers in the adult is more powerful than in youth. But we want to consider this subject only as an inherited trouble, and the statistics in this are more accurate and reliable than any other, for the reason that its symptoms are so unmistakable that there is less possibility of the friends deceiving themselves or others in regard to its existence.

Even in uncomplicated epilepsy, if the spasms are at all frequent, the sufferer's power of self-support is lessened if not destroyed, and the burden of his maintenance comes on his family and kin, or on the general public.

Eccheverria, after ten years' careful research in tracing the histories of the offspring of epileptics, found that 62 male and 74 female epileptics begat 533 children, whose life histories were as follows: 22 were still-born, 195 died in infancy from convulsions, 78 lived as epileptics, 18 lived as idiots, 39 as paralytics, 45 as hystericals, 6 had chorea, 11 were insane, 7 had strabismus, 27 died young from other causes than nervous disease, and only 145 were healthy.

Now let us look at a marriage of two epileptics : five children were born to them. Two died in infancy from convulsions, one from hydrocephalus, one lived as an epileptic, and one was bright.

Of Eccheverria's 186 original cases, 87 had parents with either insanity or epilepsy, while in 46 cases epilepsy had existed through three generations ; one woman had epilepsy from puberty until marriage and then no more. She bore four children, two were epileptic, one paralytic, and one well.

Another epileptic mother bore 15 children, eight died in infancy, two were fairly teachable imbeciles, two were epileptics,

and three had sufficient intelligence to secure husbands, and thus transmitted the heredity to succeeding generations.

The heredity of insanity is not so evident, nor is it so certainly transmitted to the offspring for the reason that very many cases of insanity are due to excesses committed in early adult life, but the census report for 1890, adding the legitimate rate of increase would give us at present 100,000 feeble-minded, and the same number insane, or 200,000 persons to feed, clothe, and support, and no doubt the number is much larger, for it is both more easy and more usual to deny than to admit idiocy in the family, while mental weakness, which results from accidental brain injury or from infantile acute disease, carries no more discredit than a broken limb or pleuritic adhesions.

The mother's love for her children and sense of family shame induces concealment. Dr. Ireland mentions a case illustrating the persistency of heredity where a mother gave birth to four feeble-minded children by four different fathers; Dr. Barr has well authenticated histories of two women, one of whom bore seven illegitimate imbecile children, each time by a different father. Another had seven imbecile offspring of whom only three could claim the same father. Dr. A. W. Wilmarth, our former first assistant at the Norristown Hospital, to whom I am much indebted for access to these reports, says he saw two idiots from the same mother but different and healthy fathers, while assistant at Ellwyn.

The most remarkable increase in some of the degenerate families which dominate in animal strength, with mental weakness, of which I am familiar, is best illustrated by two instances. One is founded on the report of Miss Schuyler, president of the New York Charity Aid Society, on "Margaret the Mother of Criminals," who is alleged to be the progenitor of a family of paupers, beggars, prostitutes, and criminals, which finally became a race of 700. The family vigor was largely preserved by intermarriages with fresh vigorous families of ruffians and some of the women bore at least 20 children, among whom were insane, epileptics, and imbeciles. I would quote further the family alluded to by Dr. Barr, in his exhaustive paper on the influence of heredity in the production of idiocy, known as "The Tribe of

Ishmael" where the descendants of one unclean man, traced through many years, multiplied by consanguineous marriages into 250 families, numbering some 5,000 individuals, whose continuous criminal record has poured over the northwest a flood of imbecility and crime.

So far I have dwelt exclusively on the heredity of these affections; let us now consider the burden which is so appalling that perhaps few have looked into it.

The six state hospitals for the insane in Pennsylvania, namely, Norristown, Wernersville, Harrisburg, Danville, Warren, and Dixmont, have about 10,000 insane, independent of the number in Blockley and the numerous poorhouses of the counties. Taking the cost of keeping each per week at Norristown, which is the third lowest in the United States, at \$2.94, will cost the state \$2,940,000 for maintenance. To this you add \$500,000 for betterments as it is generally called, or improvements. The original cost for grounds and buildings about \$10,000,000; six per cent. interest on this principal is \$600,000, and then we will learn that Pennsylvania expends annually, \$4,040,000 for insane only in those six institutions. This alone is an average cost of \$4.00 for every voter in the state, to say nothing of the feeble-minded at Ellwyn, Pittsburg, the poorhouses in every county, and of the enormous costs in courts where this class multiplies expenses so rapidly.

Nor is the burden only measured by dollars and cents, as I have shown you above, but also in endangering human lives and property. It often happens that after murder the perpetrator is adjudged insane, and stealing and defrauding are hardly less offensive. This subject has confronted alienists for a long time and how to dispose of it in a more favorable way has not submitted to a proper solution yet.

The remedy for this state of affairs is a subject which demands earnest thought and radical measures for relief. The evil is so grafted on the every-day life of society that to think of its immediate or entire suppression would be folly, but it is time to make a beginning. We cannot expect much relief from purely medical means. No more hopeless disease exists among the common maladies than epilepsy in the adult. The relative small number

of recoveries in hospitals for the insane would be largely diminished if we subtracted those committed to recover from alcoholism and cases of recurrent insanity who recover only to be recommitted.

I know of one individual who enriched the records of a hospital with nine recoveries inside of a period of that many years. The superintendent of an institution for feeble-minded no longer looks for restoration to normal brain power in any large number, and even in such cases as do leave, there is a fear that their places may soon be claimed by their children. He derives his principal satisfaction from the fact that in the asylum his institution affords, the unfortunate, the low-grade imbecile, and the idiot are safer and more comfortable, and the high grade is at least safer than he could be elsewhere; also in the fact that healthy children are relieved of associates who could do them no possible good, the family freed of a care and expense often so burdensome as to keep them poor, and lastly that the yearly increasing care which often wears out the mother prematurely is removed, thus allowing the other children more of her time and attention.

Again, by isolating the girls of child-bearing age, we are diminishing the ranks of criminals, drunkards, vagabonds, and prostitutes. In referring to the state care of defective girls, during the child-bearing period, no explanation of its necessity is needed, or why it is more urgently needed than in the other sex; for no normal woman is in the same danger from an imbecile man, as the girl with normal passion and little power of self-restraint, is from the vicious man. It seems strange that our marriage laws should be so lax. The marriage of the unfit goes on unhindered. The epileptic may marry his kind, the deaf and dumb his or her kind, the drunkard from a body thoroughly diseased may produce any number of defective children to become public wards, to be supported by the more self-respecting and industrious.

There is no legal restriction against the man whose grandfather and father were insane, and who has been insane himself, marrying some woman similarly gifted, and charging the result of offspring to the public.

The lunacy law of Pennsylvania expressly provides that per-

sons while still insane may go home for a stated period to resume all their family relations. Is it not time for a radical change in this condition of affairs? Should not more stringent marriage laws be enacted and enforced? Should we not follow the example of New York State, which restricts and provides for mentally and morally enfeebled girls especially from puberty to menopause? So long as such a state of affairs continues, we must expect a constant increase in the number of the defective class, the size and number of our charitable institutions, the growth of crime and misery, and the burden of taxation.

The marriage of such persons should be legally prohibited. It is silly to protest that such measures would increase sexual crime. Sin will exist as long as human weakness shall live and it is not to be controlled by permitting the constant increase of a class least able to exercise self-control. Women, in every way fitted to become wives and mothers, hesitate, before the responsibilities such a position entails, while the other class rush headlong at the first opportunity, merely to gratify animal passion or instinct and assume duties they can never adequately fulfil.

The right of the public to control powers which militate against the public good, is not to be denied, and such laws judicially applied would work no material hardships, and interfere with no one's just rights.

In conclusion : On whom does this responsibility of righting the wrong fall more heavily than upon ourselves? No one understands as we understand, how surely the fruit follows the seed in these matters, and no one's word would have the same weight in moulding public opinion to force legislation to this end.

The act of marrying two people, one of whom is known to be afflicted with either of the defects herein specified, or who has already borne more than one defective child, should as certainly subject the offender to punishment as would any other offense against the public peace and morals. The whole body of the intelligent public would join opinion with us in this matter. The voice of the clergy would be with us in recognizing the high duties of marriage, with the exception of a very few who by no means represent their body, but who utterly neglect the divine warning that the father's sin will curse the life of the child, and

cheerfully perpetuate the curse for the mere pittance of a Jewish half shekel of silver as a compensation.

These two measures—guarding and defending the weak during the child-bearing age, and preventing in some measure marriage among those who can only perpetuate and increase human poverty, suffering, and crime—would be at least a step in unloading the burden, although fall far short of fully solving the great question. They have the advantage, however, of being practicable.

The most radical measure, and one that may come sooner or later is "The Castration of the Defective."

This radical measure to prevent the extension of mental weakness by inheritance, through the removal of the ovaries, advocated by Dr. Kerlin, and emphatically endorsed by the late Dr. Goddell, is perhaps too advanced for immediate and general adoption, but robbed, as the operation is, of most of its dangers by the skill of the modern surgeon, it is difficult to understand why these women should retain a function which will only bring transmission of this great misfortune, entailing as it does suffering, unhappiness, helplessness, or crime. And Dr. Eskridge, in his able treatise on mental diseases, says: "I shall not attempt to discuss the castration of the defective to prevent the propagation of his own kind; for at first thought this seems barbarous and inhuman, but the day is rapidly coming when enlightened penologists, physicians, and statesmen will give this subject careful thought."

In the interests of the human race, something ought to be done to prevent injudicious or almost criminal marriages between persons whose offspring are doomed to idiocy, imbecility, or epilepsy. Could these unfortunate children have an intelligent voice in their procreation, we could imagine them on bended knees, with uplifted hands and weeping eyes, earnestly beseeching and imploring their would-be parents to desist from bringing them into a state in the which it were better never to have been born, and the begetting of children by such parents would be an outrage upon society.

We cannot abolish human sin and human weakness, but we can deprive them of the seal of the state and the Christian Church.

Lehigh Valley Medical Magazine

THE OFFICIAL ORGAN OF THE
LEHIGH VALLEY MEDICAL ASSOCIATION.

W. P. WALKER, M.D., Editor.

W. H. DUDLEY, M.D., Business Manager.

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EDITORIAL.

"State Board of Medical Examiners and the Degree of M.D."—This is the heading of a communication by Dr. Theodore Diller, in the February number of the *Pennsylvania Medical Journal*. As it touches upon a topic which is agitating the profession throughout the United States, the many misstatements in that communication ought not to pass without contradiction, which need not be done were the topic not so timely. If our readers will refer to p. 484 of the *Journal*, they will be able to determine if we interpret the article fairly.

The first error is comparing an examination for the M.D. degree with the examination of a lawyer, admitting to the bar; or of a clergyman, leading to ordination. We have theological seminaries granting the degree of S.T.B. or B.D., and law schools giving a degree of LL.B., but few courts and still fewer church councils would accept the possessor of a degree without

its own examination to determine the fitness of the candidate.

The next error is the assumption that a graduate of a medical school thereby acquires a legal right to practise—not so; the degree is but a university distinction. It is true that it was not so regarded for a number of years in the United States, and even yet in some states the law makes the possession of the degree the only qualification, but the right is not inherent to the degree, any more than the S.T.B. ordains a man to preach, or the LL.B. permits its possessor to plead.

The third error may be only a matter of opinion. He suggests that Pennsylvania should examine the candidates for the degree of doctor of medicine, and that the degree be conferred only on those who pass the state examination, so that their doctorate would give them the license to practise, and adds: "Such action would place Pennsylvania in line with enlightened European states." Many of us would include Germany and Austria in this class, but an M.D. from Berlin or Vienna does not permit its holder to practise in either country until he passes *Staats Examen*; and it is not an unheard-of incident that a doctor in medicine of a German university determined to bestow his service in the United States because he failed to secure his state license to practise at home.

The errors of fact in the doctor's letter cause it to act as an astronomical telescope, where everything is reversed, and it seems to him that the horse is behind the cart. If he will make use of the facts as they are, these will serve as the erecting eye-piece in that instrument, whereby it will cause him to see that the juxtaposition of the horse and the cart is entirely normal, and in harmony with the turn-outs of the other professions.

Membership of the Lehigh Valley Medical Association.—In this issue we publish a list of the members of the association. The names are arranged alphabetically under the headings of the different counties, embraced within the territory of the association. One of our members suggested a short time ago that such a list would be convenient, and as nothing giving this information has been issued recently, it was decided to publish it in the MAGAZINE.

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